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Newstead House: the social history, culture and architecture of a bygone era

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ABSTRACT:

Historic house museums form a significant component of the built heritage and social history of a country. They vary from the elaborate mansions of the wealthy to modest dwellings of the working class. Regardless of the original owner's status in society these house museums are vital to an understanding of architecture, culture and society from a bygone era. The Newstead House, the oldest surviving residence, in Brisbane, is the first house to be designated a 'Historic House Museum' in Queensland. It is a representative example of a house that demonstrates the British colonial heritage of 19th century Australia. Originally a modest cottage, on 34 acres of land, the Newstead house was built by a Scottish migrant. The ownership of the house and land changed many times, during the period from 1847 to 1939. During this period a series of prominent residents of Brisbane either owned or rented this residence. They included, an officer of the Royal Navy, politicians, magistrates, merchant ship owners, and a Consul General of the United States of America. As a result, the house went through a series of renovations and extensions to accommodate the needs of its owners and their position in society. This paper aims to investigate the significance of historic museum houses in educating the community on aspects of social history, culture and architecture of 19th century Australia. It will focus on the heritage listed Newstead House as a case study to demonstrate the significance of the house as an artefact and an educational tool.

1 INTRODUCTION

House museums are repositories of the tangible features pertaining to a society's cultural history. These tangible characteristics are expressed through various means such as the arrangement of furniture; the photographs of people who lived in the house; the location of rooms and the spaces that accommodated large gatherings when entertaining; the segregation of the served and the servants, the gardens and so on. Thus a house, through its architecture and exhibits, communicates the history, society and culture of a bygone era. In a historic house museum the link between the building, the collection, and the owner, facilitates the communication, interaction with and appreciation of the historic period and society that it comprises (Cabral, 2001).

According to The Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 1999, p. 2) “...cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects...” (Worthing & Bond 2008). The Newstead house, one of the significant cultural assets of Queensland, is a house museum that educates the general public on the history of Queensland. In addition it serves the public through free concerts; picnic spots in the garden; guided tours; educational programmes and as a popular venue for wedding celebrations.

Newstead House is the first building to be designated a house museum, in Queensland, Australia. (Royle & Glasscock 1996). In addition, the site, on which the house stands, at the junction of Breakfast Creek and the Brisbane River, was also popular with the original owners of the land, the Indigenous Australians (Ballard & Roessler 1993).

Today, The Newstead House Trust, assisted by a team of volunteers called Friends of Newstead Inc is in charge of the conservation and maintenance of this heritage listed property. The latest conservation work, in 2007, included the refurbishment of the Master bedroom to reflect late 19th century interiors (<http://www.newsteadhouse.com.au/friends/friends.htm>). As a house museum it demonstrates, through its architecture and exhibits, the lifestyle of the early migrants who were mainly of British origin. They included pioneering pastoralists of Queensland, a former officer of the Royal Navy, police magistrate, merchant ship owners, and a Consul General of the United States of America.

This study will demonstrate how the intangible aspects of society are made tangible through the architecture, the furniture and use of space of a house through an analysis of the stages of its development over the years. It will ascertain the role played by house museums in the education of the public, particularly primary and secondary students on the history, society and culture of Queensland.

2. NEWSTEAD HOUSE: a background

The historic Newstead House was completed in 1846, three years following the opening of Moreton Bay region (present day Queensland) to free settlers. The site, facing the Brisbane River, dictated the orientation of the house. Starting as a Georgian cottage built in 1846 for a Scottish migrant from an elite family; it is now a house museum in a suburb that was named after the house. Newstead House is a narrative of the lifestyles of some of the early prominent citizens of Brisbane and Queensland (Gregory 2010, Hogan 1979).



Fig 1: View from the Brisbane River (east entrance)



Fig. 2: View from the driveway (west entrance)

Over the years, Newstead had many owners and has undergone dramatic transformation; from a modest cottage into a sprawling homestead with intricate balustrades; spacious verandas; a vista that incorporates the Brisbane River; and surrounding parkland (figs.1&2). From late 19th and early 20th centuries, a series of prominent residents of Brisbane either owned or rented this resi-

dence. In 1918, with purchase of the property by the Brisbane City council Newstead House public property ((Ballard & Roessler 1993).

In 1939, the Queensland Government, by an Act of Parliament, created a Trust, called The Newstead House Trust. It is said to be first ever legislation passed through the parliament of Queensland for the conservation of a historic building (Gregory, 2010). This Trust, consisting of Brisbane City Council, the Historical Society and Queensland Government as trustees, then became the custodian of the Newstead House. Thus, the preservation of a vital part of Queensland's history was guaranteed. In 1932, The Headquarters of the Historical Society of QLD was moved to the Newstead House on a 21 year lease (Royle & Glasscock 1996). Architect JVD Coutts was commissioned by the trustees to make an assessment of repair work needed on the house. However, with limited funds and the looming shadow of war on the horizon the repairs were limited to the basics such as the timber veranda floor, posts and brackets, wooden doors; roofing, gutters and downpipes; and some work on the interior. In November 1940, after the completion of repair and maintenance work, Newstead House was opened to the public, as a museum of Queensland History, by Sir Leslie Wilson, the Governor of Queensland (Royle & Glasscock 1996; Gregory, 2010; Luttrell, G.G. 1974)

During the Second World War, from 1942 to 1946, Newstead House was occupied by the US Army and many records pertaining to the house were lost during this period (Luttrell 1974). A monument currently stands on the grounds to commemorate the role played by Newstead House during this period. In 1950, The QLD Women's Historical Association (QWHA) was formed at Newstead and they occupied a room for 18 years. In 1955 the 'Friends of Newstead Inc.' a volunteer organization was formed and they continue to assist The Newstead House Trust in the conservation and maintenance of the house (Royle & Glasscock 1996). In 1969, major alterations and repair were done by Brisbane Works Department, The Royal Historical Society of Queensland and the Newstead House Trust to restore the house to reflect Victorian styles and values. In 1970 the Board of Trustees, with the objective of educating people on the society and lifestyle of Brisbane in the 19th century, refurbished the house to return it to the residence it once was (Hogan 1979). The Australian Heritage Commission entered Newstead House in Australia's Register of the National Estate in 1978 thus establishing the significance of preserving the house for future generations (Ballard &Roessler 1993).

Over the years Newstead House went through many extensions and alterations. The most significant phases of these developments are:

- The original cottage built and occupied by Patrick Leslie and his wife Kate in 1846
- The house extended and occupied by Capt. John Wickham and his wife Anna from 1847 to 1860s.
- The house extended further and greatly altered by Brisbane's prominent architect James Cowlshaw, for the 3rd owner of the house George Harris, in 1860s.

Newstead House, as it stands today, has had only one major change made since the time it was the Harris family home, which is the annex built in 1890 to replace the former service wing. The social and cultural life of Brisbane represented by this house will be examined next through the changes done to the house to accommodate the lifestyle of the afore mentioned prominent citizens of Queensland (Ballard &Roessler 1993).

3. NEWSTEADHOUSE: from 1845-1846

Newstead House was completed in 1846 for Patrick Leslie and his wife Kate from the Darlings Downs, of the colony of New South Wales, Australia. Today, 167 years later, Newstead House survives as Brisbane's oldest house. Patrick Leslie, a 29year old Scottish migrant, the son of the 10th laird of Warthill, Aberdeenshire, bought the land on which Newstead House stands on the 9th April 1845. The land comprised of 34 acres, two blocks of 17 acres each. He bought it for his father, William Leslie, a resident in Scotland (fig.4). The adjoining block of 25 acres was

bought by Captain John Wickham who was the Police Magistrate of Moreton Bay district and Patrick Leslie's brother-in-law. (Royle & Glasscock 1996; Luttrell, 1974).

Andrew Petrie, Brisbane's first builder, is believed to be the builder of Newstead House (Mckinnon 1947; Petrie 1937). The red-brick two storied house was constructed of double bricks on a stone foundation. The hipped roof was originally of slate and had two chimneys on either side. Each chimney, and thus each fireplace, was shared by two rooms. The cottage measuring 45 ½ feet x 32 feet (13.9m x 9.9m) was raised off a basement and had identical lay-outs on both floors (Fig.3). The ground floor, partly buried on the sloping site, had the kitchen, two cellars, servants' room and a pantry. Correspondingly, the upper floor had two large rooms serving as sitting room and bedroom with two smaller rooms, directly behind them, serving as dining and dressing rooms. The sitting room and bedroom had French doors opening onto an eight foot front veranda that faced the Brisbane River. This was the main façade of the house, especially for those arriving by boat. While the opposite side, had the entrance hall, off the veranda that was accessible by a few steps, and faced the driveway for those arriving by carriage or horseback (Royle & Glasscock 1996; Hogan, 1979; Ballard & Roessler 1993; Waller, K.G.T. 1957)

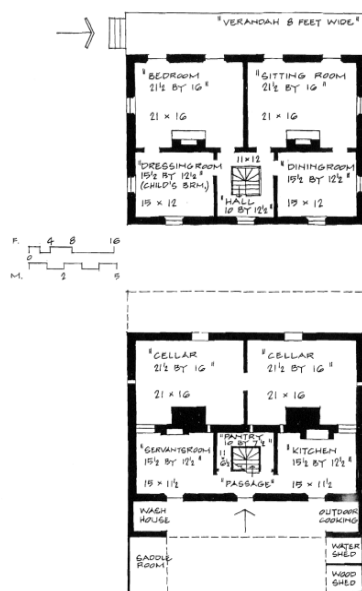


Fig.3: Leslie cottage plans

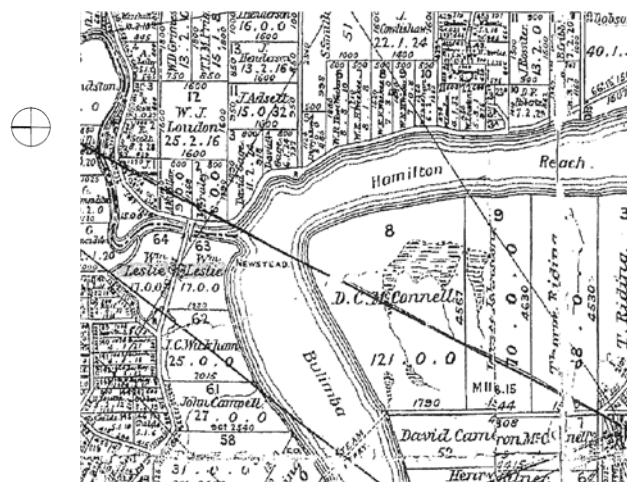


Fig.4: Map showing plots bought by Leslie (62 & 63)

Source: Ballard & Roessler 1993. p.20 Source: Stewart 2005, p.11

According to Royle and Glasscock (1996, p.12) "Although a relatively simple cottage, Newstead would have been one of the best houses in Brisbane Town at the time." On the 10th April 1845, Patrick Leslie, upon the purchase of the land, wrote to his parents, "Most lovely situation for a cottage commanding a magnificent view and the land is very rich, part of it is the finest brush land and will yield great crops." (Waller, 1957. p. 119). However, in June 1847, a year after the completion of the cottage, he wrote to his father that he had instructed his attorney to sell Newstead House to Capt. John Clement Wickham, for £1000. Capt. Wickham was married to his wife Kate's sister Anna (Ballard & Roessler 1993; Stewart, 2005). Patrick, his wife Kate and son William left for New South Wales in 1847 (Royle & Glasscock 1996; Hogan, 1979).

4. NEWSTEADHOUSE: from 1847-1860

Captain John Wickham's land holdings increased to 59 acres when he purchased Newstead House. Wickham was appointed Police Magistrate, for the Moreton Bay district of New South Wales, in January 1843. This was after the closure of the convict settlement and opening of the district to free settlers in 1842. In addition to supervision of the Moreton Bay district he also took on the role of Protector of Aborigines (Stewart 2005). He and his family lived at Newstead House until 1859.

John Clement Wickham was born in Leith, Scotland on 21st December, 1798. He was a 1st Lieutenant and served in HMS Beagle, that surveyed the Australian coastline. He married Anna Macarthur, the daughter of an influential family from New South Wales, in October of 1842. The John and Anna Wickham arrived in Brisbane in January of 1843. Their first house was the house vacated by the commandant of the convict settlement. (Royle & Glasscock 1996; Stewart, Brian). They had two children before moving into Newstead in 1847 and two more were born at Newstead House (Ballard & Roessler 1993)

Capt. Wickham and his wife Anna made Newstead their home for 13 years. It was during their occupancy that Newstead became established as the centre of the social scene in Brisbane. Wickham rose to the position of Government Resident in Moreton Bay for the New South Wales government. It was in this capacity, as the leading citizen of the district, that he and his wife played host to prominent citizens, government officials and important visitors to Moreton Bay. They became well known for their hospitality and distinguished visitors to Brisbane Town either stayed or were invited to lavish dinner parties and balls at Newstead House (Ballard & Roessler. 1993). They included: the Governor Charles Fitzroy of New South Wales, Bishops, aristocrats, and artists such Conrad Martens (Gregory 2010).

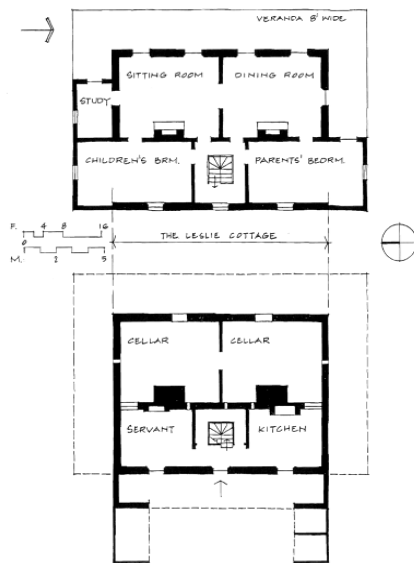


Fig. 5: Wikham House plans

Source: Ballard & Roessler 1993. p.128

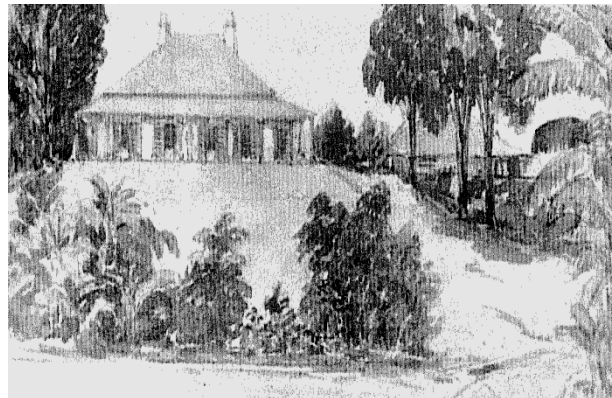


Fig 6: Newstead House after extended by Capt. Wickham

Source: Stewart, B. (2005) p.12

As such Newstead House was enlarged to accommodate these large gatherings and balls that Capt. Wickham and his wife Anna had to entertain on a regular basis. These included (fig. 5); removing the end walls on the northern side and replacing them by 6 inch (15cm) stud walls; adding a children's and parents bedroom; adding verandas to the remaining three sides to enclose the house; installing folding doors to open up the two main rooms in order create a large ballroom when needed; plastering and painting the walls red. The earth work on the walls made the eastern façade of the house, overlooking the river, look like a single storied Georgian cottage (fig.6). (Royle & Glasscock 1996. Stewart, 2005).

Wickham's wife Anna, died in 1853, in Sydney where she was taking treatment after the birth of her 3rd child. The lavish entertaining at Newstead House continued with Wickham's sister-in-law, Emma Jane acting as hostess. In addition, Newstead House also hosted numerous house guests on a regular basis. Seven years after the death of his first wife Anna, Wickham married his second wife, Ellen Deering on 1st October 1857 (Royle & Glasscock 1996; Ballard & Roessler 1993).

According to Stewart (2005, p.12) "Newstead House became the centre of hospitality in Brisbane. Guests on their way to social assemblies at the house arrived under armed guards." Many of these guests entertained and hosted at Newstead left glowing comments on their hosts (Ballard & Roessler 1993). One such guest, Margaret Ann Ogg wrote, "....many of the gatherings were graced by the urbanity and beauty of descendants of the English aristocracy." (Gregory 2010, p.7)

In 1859, with the separation of Moreton Bay settlement from New South Wales and the proclamation of the colony of Queensland, Wickham was offered the position of Colonial Treasurer, but, he declined and left Queensland (Gregory, 2010; Hogan, 1979; Royle & Glasscock 1996; Luttrell, 1974). Wickham's household effects were auctioned on 20th January 1860. The list of items for the auction clearly showed the lifestyle of the upper class of Brisbane society in the 19th century. The list included: rosewood furniture, piano forte, a 188 piece dinner service, and cut glass. Newstead House was rented soon after their departure (Royle, & Glasscock 1996).

5. NEWSTEADHOUSE: from 1863-1890

After the departure of Wickham family in 1859, Newstead House was leased by the first Attorney General of Queensland for two years, from 1860 until 1862. The house was put on sale at the end of that lease. In 1863, George Harris, a Brisbane merchant, became the first businessman to own and live in Newstead House. He bought the house for £4,000 (Austin 1947). George Harris was married to Jane Thorn, daughter of George Thorn who was responsible for administering the convict outstation at Ipswich from 1827 (Gregory 2010). They lived in Newstead House for 27 years, first as tenants, then as owners and then again as tenants. They celebrated the birth of three children at Newstead House. The Harris era at Newstead is also noted for lavish entertaining (Hogan 1979; Gregory 2010). Newstead House continued to be the focus of Brisbane's social life during their 27 years of residence (Royle & Glasscock 1996).

George Harris, was born in London in 1831, and arrived in Sydney with his parents and siblings in 1833. He came to Brisbane in 1848 to work for his brother John. In 1853 he and his brother formed the company J & G Harris. They were general merchants and commission agents (Ballard & Roessler 1993). It became a very successful business in the new colony of Queensland. In 1860 George Harris was appointed to the Queensland Parliament Legislative Council by Queensland's first Governor. He remained in that position until 1876 (Royle & Glasscock 1996).

The Harris family occupied the house the longest. They made extensions, along the north and south ends of the house, to suit their social standing and lifestyle. The plans, shown in the study by Ballard and Roesellar, shows that Newstead House during the occupancy of Harris family was three times the size of the original modest cottage built by Patrick Leslie (Fig. 6 & 7).

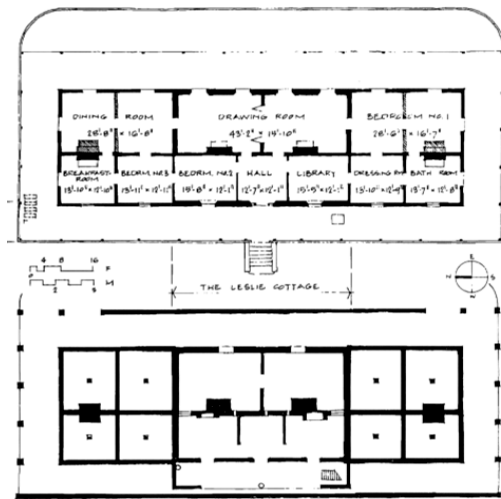


Fig. 6: Harris House Plans

Source: Ballard & Roessler 1993. p.130



Fig.7: Newstead House after extended by Harris

Source: Gregory, H (2009) - cover

It is believed that these changes were made by Brisbane architect James Cowlshaw in early 1865. Newstead House as it stands today is very much the result of these changes made that reflect the social life of a very successful merchant in 19th century Brisbane. Cowlshaw's

Design emphasized the west entrance as the main entrance to the house accessed through a flight of sandstone steps to the veranda and then onto the entrance hall. Thus horse drawn carriages were able to be driven along the driveway to this new front entrance to the house. The verandas were enlarged by two feet, making them ten feet wide and enclosing the entire house. The original staircase to the lower level, through the entrance hall, was removed. The access to the lower level was then changed to a ladder and trapdoor on the veranda. It is believed that Harris may have also added the two marble fireplaces in the main rooms and the new kitchen facilities (the present annex).

Newstead House became synonymous with lavish social gatherings such as wedding celebrations, 21st birthday parties, and sophisticated dinner parties (Gregory 2010). Queensland newspapers often reported on the grand entertaining of guests at Newstead House. It was the place to be seen amongst the social elite in 19th century Brisbane. John and Jane were regarded as very generous hosts (Royle & Glasscock 1996). Further, they were also keen contributors to the Brisbane community. For example in January 1877 they hosted 400 children and teachers to a Sunday School Festival on the grounds of Newstead House (Ballard & Roessler 1993).

The weddings of the Harris daughters were social events extensively reported in local newspapers and they depicted the lifestyle of the well-to-do families in the early years of the colony. The eldest daughter Edith Maud married George Condamine Taylor from a successful pastoral family in Toowoomba, Queensland. The lavish reception at the Harris-Taylor wedding, which took place at Newstead, was reported by the media as - "The festivities at hospitable Newstead in connection with marriage were so princely ...the house itself is as well suited for guest purposes as any in the neighbourhood of Brisbane...." (*Week*, 1st September 1883). It was also reported that 300 guests could sit down to supper at a given time; the ballroom accommodated over 350 guests and dancing continued till early morning; and the Newstead grounds were lit by numerous Chinese lanterns (Ballard & Roessler 1993).

On the 23rd May 1888, the reception to celebrate the wedding of Evelyn Harris, the second daughter, to Richard Gardiner Casey, the son of a member of parliament, was also held at Newstead House. The following day the Brisbane Courier reported, "...between 200 and 250 guests

sat down to wedding breakfast at Newsteadthe Defence Force Band played an excellent selection of music during breakfast ...” (The Brisbane courier, 24th may 1888). Richard Gardiner Casey became a member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly on his wedding day. Evelyn and Richard eldest son, also named Richard, became Governor General of Australia in 1965.

George Harris also entertained guests on his yacht, *Hamlet's Ghost*. The Harris'were generous hosts, however, their hospitality was sometimes abused, by guests who came uninvited and stayed for extended periods of time. Newstead House became to some extent a free hotel. Lavish entertaining and hosting house guests is said to have cost them £20,000 per year (Royle & Glasscock 1996; Ballard & Roessler 1993). George Harris' business empire included ships, tannery, boot and harness factory, cotton processing plants etc. However, speculation in mining ventures that didn't bring him good returns ruined his business empire in the 1870's (Gregory 2010). In 1874, years before his daughter got married to George Taylor; Harris mortgaged Newstead House to George's father James Taylor for £10,000. The Harris family then rented Newstead from James Taylor, their daughter's father-in-law. Thus, Wickham was a tenant at Newstead House when the wedding reception was held there (Ballard & Roessler 1993). On the 27th August 1876, J&G Harris, the commercial firm Harris owned with his brother John, went into receivership (Gregory 2010). By the end of 1876 he had to apply to the courts for bankruptcy (Royle & Glasscock 1996). At the same time he lost Newstead House to James Taylor as payment for money borrowed from him in 1876 (Luttrell 1974).

6. NEWSTEAD HOUSE AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

According to the International Council of museums (ICOM) , “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.” (ICOM 2007). Museum education is very broad in its scope. For example Museum education could include, the exhibits; the building that houses these artefacts; the important people connected with the house; guided tours by museum staff; organised special events such as public lectures, educational activities for school children, etc (Iguchi 2005). Museums provide students an opportunity to learn things different to that of formal classroom education. The learning experiences that students gain at museums are an alternative way of learning that facilitates students understanding of the past by the objects exhibited in the museum (Hooper-Greenhill 1991). During the past couple of centuries, the role of these educational activities has increased in museums and galleries (Moffated 1999). In the case of house museums, an understanding of individuals, their cultural and social values can be gained through the objects exhibited at house museums. According to Pavoni (2001, p.19) “ ...with the help of the house and its rich array of objects, symbols and conventions it is possible to convey to the visitor a simplified approach to history, art and architecture, because houses, however resplendent, are part of everyone's common experience”. The educational value of Newstead house is derived from the history that is entrenched in the house. The various extensions and improvements to the house are an indication of the social position of the individual who owned or lived at Newstead at any particular time. The educators, students and the general public that continue to visit Newstead House attests to its contribution to educating Queenslanders about their social and cultural history. Therefore, the future potentials for using the Newstead House as an educational tool is extraordinary.

As previously mentioned, the Board of Trustees, refurbished the Newstead House to the elegant residence it was in the 19th century with the aim of educating the community on the society and culture of that by gone era (Hogan 1979). One of the significant roles played by Newstead House is educational activities involving visits by primary and secondary school children. These

visits supplement the school curriculum by providing the students a personal, unique experience through the visual communication of the exhibits. A new programme will be trialled by Newstead House this year for primary school students, in Preparatory, Year One and Year Two, starting in July, in the third term of the school year. This programme is in keeping with Australian Government initiative to introduce Australian history in the earliest years of primary school. The new programme is designed with the focus on curriculum and the demography of students. Three staff members from Newstead House Museum will be conducting these classes on a weekly basis. This is in addition to visits by secondary school students who utilize Newstead House in their special projects as well as their curriculum in Modern History, Art and Film and Television studies (McKavanagh 2013).

The Moreton Bay Environmental Education Centre, Department of Education, Queensland, conducts a whole day programme at Newstead House for primary school students in grades four to six. This programme requires a minimum of two teachers and covers the Australian Curriculum on history of Australian Colonies and Studies of Society and Environment. It is aimed at experiencing and understanding the life during the period of the early settlement of Brisbane. The process involves problem solving and role playing with the students taking on the roles of the wealthy owners/tenants and their servants. Their activities for the day includes; exploring the house in silence; handling objects from the museum collection; listening to stories from the period of early settlement; learning about the past through documentary evidence and physical objects. In addition, the students get the opportunity to share their ideas with each other. (<http://moretoneec.eq.edu.au/wcms/index.php>). Furthermore, virtual tours, guided tours by museum staff; educational activities that include lectures and public talks; publication of research papers and books; and printed materials such as brochures and pamphlets are some of the most important features of the contribution to education offered by Newstead House. Thus the Newstead House provides the ideal setting for students to comprehend the social and cultural life of early Brisbane.

7. CONCLUSION

Newstead house, rich in its history and its development, exemplifies the lifestyle of a certain class of people who migrated to Brisbane in the mid-19th century. Today, it stands as a testimony to the individuals who played a significant role in the history of early Brisbane and Queensland. Newstead captures the development of Brisbane from its early years through the cottage built by Patrick Leslie, a pioneering pastoralist, to the extensions constructed by subsequent owners. The house, through its architecture, furnishings, artefacts and other collections illustrates the lifestyle and culture of the upper classe of Queensland in the 19th to early 20th centuries. Newstead House epitomised their strong links with Victorian England. In the 21st century this house museums additionally meets educational needs of the present generation, especially pertaining to the history of Australia and Queensland in general and Brisbane in particular.

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